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SUBJECT: GOMA NOTES OCTOBER 15: POSSIBLE FARDC WITHDRAWAL FROM  
TONGO; TRIPARTITE PLUS CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING; UN MILITARY MEETS  
WITH NKUNDA

REF: KINSHASA 885

1. (SBU) Summary: Goma Poloff met with FARDC General Lukama October 15 to receive his assessment of the situation in North Kivu. Lukama confirmed that going after the FDLR was a second-order priority for the FARDC compared to fighting the CNDP. He noted that his greatest challenge was his units' low morale. He also lamented the excessively fast pace of MONUC's proposed disengagement plan. At the October 15 Chiefs of Defense Tripartite Plus meeting, which Rwanda and Burundi did not attend, General Kayembe announced his decision to withdraw FARDC force from Tongo, a town some 22 kilometers into CNDP territory (pre-August). MONUC reported that fighting had resumed today in Ntamagenga, but that Nkunda was possibly making overtures for a general ceasefire and bilateral discussions with the GDRC either in a neutral North Kivu area or outside the country. MONUC also reported that some of its military observers had a chance encounter with Nkunda, who criticized an alleged lack of neutrality on the part of MONUC and who stated that some retired Rwandan military officers had joined his ranks. End Summary.

Discussion with General Lukama  
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2. (SBU) On October 15, Goma Poloff had a conversation with FARDC Major General Lukama to get his analysis of the situation in North Kivu. Lukama lamented the fact that people seemed to think he wanted war when in fact he did not. He had initially been sent to the Kivus to command the current 10 FARDC battalions that are part of the joint FARDC-MONUC Operation Kimia against the FDLR. He has since been appointed commander of all FARDC operations against the CNDP. This of course included the Kimia battalions. Lukama conceded that the CNDP was FARDC's first priority, then eventually the FDLR. (Note: MONUC military and Poloff find Lukama approachable and relatively open. It is widely believed that he does not seem to wield any significant power within the FARDC. End note.)

3. (SBU) When asked about who is really giving orders in North Kivu, Lukama admitted that there are plenty of times when orders go around him from Kinshasa directly to the brigade commanders on the ground. However, he stressed he was not entirely out of the loop. In any case, the real challenge for him was trying to execute some sort of disengagement plan on multiple fronts. He compared the situation to a horse race in which some horses gallop and others trot - the goal is always to reach the finish, but the pace is different. Similarly, certain areas in North Kivu were ready for establishing zones of separation, but it was impossible to stick to the intense timeline created by MONUC that called for disengagement across all fronts within a few weeks and sometimes days.

4. (SBU) Lukama warned that public perception of MONUC was a genuine concern, as this can impede MONUC movement and even present a serious danger for MONUC soldiers, as it has in the past. He admitted some of the local demonstrations were the work of agitators

with an agenda, though he did not specifically say who the agitators were. It was not inconceivable, however, that at some point public opinion could turn against MONUC to the extent that ill-informed or disgruntled FARDC soldiers might feel emboldened enough to open fire on MONUC. Lukama also expressed concern about the morale of his soldiers, particularly when they were asked to withdraw from areas they had fought hard to gain. It would be difficult in the future to expect them to conduct any offensive operations because they would understand that, ultimately, they would have to give up what they had achieved.

15. (SBU) Lukama said he continued to be willing to meet with Nkunda or any lower-level CNDP cadre. In the meantime, it would be important for MONUC and the international facilitation to understand that things take time in the DRC. It would be better to have a ceasefire, which is respected for one-two months, before pushing for disengagement and zones of separation. He said he wanted to establish better communication with MONUC, noting that he had not been informed of the results of a recent three-day joint FARDC-MONUC operation around the town of Mpofi (Walikale territory) that was carried out last week (reftel).

Tripartite Plus Chiefs of Defense Meeting

16. (SBU) Directly following the discussion with Lukama, Poloff attended the Tripartite Plus meeting along with Embassy Kinshasa DATT. The meeting turned out to be a bilateral event as the Rwandans and Burundians did not attend -- the former citing security concerns in Goma and the latter stating that their head of delegation was too busy. The Ugandan Government was represented by the Ugandan chief of intelligence. The GDRC was represented by FARDC Chief of Defense General Kayembe; Generals Etumba, Lukama, and Mayala were also present. MONUC was represented by the new Force

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Commander, Spanish Lieutenant General Diaz; the North Kivu Brigade Commander, Indian Brigadier General Rawat; and the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Force Headquarters (Forward), British Colonel Cunliffe.

17. (SBU) After opening remarks, Kayembe called for a ten-minute break during which the Ugandan and Congolese delegations could privately share intelligence information. The rest of the meeting did not relate directly to traditional Tripartite issues, but rather dealt with the status of MONUC's disengagement plan for North Kivu. More precisely, the discussion focused on a proposed withdrawal of FARDC soldiers from the town of Tongo in Rutshuru territory. All sides agree that Tongo was well within CNDP territory prior to the renewal of hostilities on August 28. FARDC's presence there since late September has been a major CNDP complaint.

18. (SBU) Kayembe claimed that Tongo was only tactically important, if the FARDC intended to continue an advance further into CNDP territory, which it did not. He said the main objective of the FARDC was to protect Goma for which holding onto Tongo would not be necessary. Therefore, a withdrawal was definitely a possibility, if MONUC could guarantee certain assurances and modalities. Kayembe then asked both Generals Etumba and Lukama to give their viewpoints on the political and military aspects of a FARDC withdrawal from Tongo. Etumba said that a withdrawal should be managed carefully on a political level, as local officials would likely try to interfere or lay blame somewhere. The governor would have to be given precise talking points on how to announce the initiative. MONUC would also have to fill in the gap at Tongo once the FARDC left. He added that the withdrawal should be no more than three kilometers.

19. (SBU) Lukama agreed that holding Tongo was not necessary and an order to withdraw could be executed in six hours. However, he had three major concerns. First, a FARDC withdrawal could cause the town's population to evacuate, fearing a CNDP return. This could have humanitarian consequences. Second, simply pulling back unilaterally from Tongo might be seen by other soldiers as a military defeat and could cause a significant morale problem, which might even lead to the collapse of FARDC frontlines across North Kivu. Third, he recalled that when Mushake fell to the CNDP, as well as when the 7th Integrated Brigade evacuated Nyanzale to the CNDP, there was political fallout. Soldiers and civilians alike spoke out strongly against their political and military leaders for having sold out to the CNDP. The result would be that soldiers might not follow such orders in the future.

110. (SBU) Kayembe stated that not everything was attainable, and

that tough choices would have to be made. For now, timing the FARDC withdrawal with MONUC's security measures would be essential. The governor should be encouraged to issue a statement, which would clearly portray the withdrawal as a FARDC decision, not a MONUC order. Responding to General Diaz' comment that the FARDC should pull back 22 kilometers from Tongo, not three, Kayembe assured him that the three kilometers were only an initial step to a more comprehensive withdrawal. The next step would be for Generals Mayala and Rawat to discuss the modalities of the withdrawal.

Meeting with New Force Commander

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¶11. (SBU) Several hours following the Tripartite meeting, members of the international facilitation met briefly with incoming Force Commander General Diaz. His initial impressions after two weeks on the ground were that MONUC was in a tough position vis-a-vis the civilian population; that they were losing the media war; and that military units were being stretched very thin. MONUC's primary mandate remained protecting the civilian population and ensuring freedom of movement, but MONUC's broad deployment meant there were no reserves available to effectively conduct other missions, such as those targeting the FDLR. These operations would thus remain limited in frequency and scope. Meanwhile, he had recently spoken with SRSG Alan Doss, who had instructed him to encourage bilateral discussions between FARDC and Nkunda on military matters. Meanwhile, MONUC would continue to apply pressure on armed groups.

Military Update and MONUC Military Visit with Nkunda

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¶12. (SBU) At the October 15 military briefing, MONUC reported that North Kivu Governor Paluku had just announced on Radio Okapi that the FARDC would be pulling out of Tongo soon. Earlier in the day, however, the FARDC had in fact engaged the CNDP around Ntamagenga. Fighting was still ongoing during the Tripartite meeting with General Kayembe, during which the FARDC seemed to be making a significant gesture for peace. (Note: While on break at the morning Tripartite meeting, Poloff observed General Lukama using a hand-drawn sketch to give tactical instructions to General Mayala, who then left the room and did not return. Key phrases that were overheard were "Ntamagenga," "Colonel Delphin," and "move here to secure the village." End note.)

¶13. (SBU) MONUC reported that military observers had run into Nkunda while on patrol and had been invited to meet with him.

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Nkunda welcomed them to approach him at any time to verify any information they needed. He then went on to make the usual complaints about FARDC-FDLR collaboration and stated that FDLR disarmament would be a necessary precondition to any such move by the CNDP. He complained that the Amani Process was stagnant. He pointed out that he had released FARDC soldiers, while the FARDC had not reciprocated. He recommended three actions to advance the peace process: MONUC should be truly neutral and not simply support FARDC, which is in fact supporting the FDLR; MONUC should secure a neutral place for negotiations either in a buffer zone or outside the country; and MONUC should ask the GDRC to announce a ceasefire at which point the CNDP would do likewise. Nkunda claimed that President Kabila "could use a man like himself" to run the DRC's security affairs. He lamented the exploitation of the DRC's resources by countries like Uganda and Angola, as well as by the United States (uranium in Katanga). Finally, Nkunda admitted that there were sometimes Rwandans in his areas of control, but that these were friends who had retired from the Rwandan Defense Forces and had come to support him.

Comment

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¶14. (SBU) As of the evening of October 15 there had been no sign of a FARDC withdrawal from Tongo despite the Governor's announcement. Lukama noted during a private discussion that the FARDC battalion commander in Tongo was actually from Tongo and that his parents still lived there. He certainly would have no interest in returning Tongo to the CNDP. The commander supposedly told General Lukama that, if ordered to withdraw from the town, he would instead move his men to Kiroliro to attack Nkunda himself. At the same time, it is unclear whether General Kayembe is fully capable of carrying out an order to withdraw from Tongo. Some in MONUC view him as being outside the President's inner circle, which also excludes Lukama and Mayala, but which includes Etumba, generally considered to be a

hardliner. End Comment.  
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